

The Big March in Washington Is Described as 'Epic of Democracy'

BY MAX FREEDMAN

I owe an obligation to my conscience to write about the great Negro march in Washington. This event cannot be judged by the ordinary rules of journalism which bid us comment on the immediate news. The afterglow of this demonstration will be with us for a long time to come, and its deeper meaning will be explored by the historians.

The wisest man I have been privileged to know, or am ever likely to know, has correctly described the march as an "epic of democracy." That is the proper spirit in which to measure its worth.

Like countless others, I wished the march every success but dreaded the risks which it raised. In such a multitude, it would take only a small spark to kindle a flame of hatred and violence. As all the world knows, the march and demonstration were triumphs of democracy in action.

But it is just not good enough to record this fact with a sense of relief or as a form of routine praise. The character of the march is a golden fact that cannot be tarnished by the mean little arts of the critics.

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Dr. Martin Luther King praised the marchers for their dignity and discipline. In this tribute he fell below the height of the achievement. For their dignity was won through self-discipline.

This fact is worth remembering, for every suffering minority deserves to be honored for its achievements instead of being censured for its failures. When next we read of fighting in the streets — and there will be many such episodes — let us have the grace, before we condemn the Negro demonstrators, to ask ourselves if it is not possible that some brutal local official goaded them into violence or provoked them into disorder.

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The Negroes are not always to blame, especially when they are blamed quickly and harshly.

If the march had been a failure, if it had been small in numbers, nasty in tem-

per, and violent in action, would we ever have been allowed to forget this disaster? Why are our memories so tenacious of insult and so forgetful of idealism? Is this really fair to ourselves or to the Negro?

There is another test from which we dare not shrink. Would the segregationists in America, in the North as in the South, like to stage a similar demonstration and place their values against those of the Negro for the impartial judgment of the American people?

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Let us be candid and fair. The segregationists could easily organize a march of 200,000 Americans on Washington. Not all these men and women would be bigots or fanatics or extremists. Many of them would be citizens of honor and distinction.

But what case could they make in the clear light of day in defense of imposed and compulsory segregation? What arguments could they use to satisfy the reason of the broad mass of the American people? What appeal could they offer to the conscience of America?

Until they can answer these questions, they would be wise to avoid

any competition with Dr. Martin Luther King.

For Dr. King has the outraged majesty of the American dream on his side and they have only the nightmare of racial discrimination. He speaks with matchless eloquence of the wrongs of Negroes and we wish to give them the rights of Americans. Not a snarling word of bitterness fell from his impassioned lips.

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Ghandi certainly would have approved. So would Lincoln and Jefferson. His allies are the agonies and exultations of the human spirit, and the invincible mind of man reaching forever forward to freedom and equality. Are there enough jails in this country to break this cause?

Gladstone said eloquence consists in drawing inspiration from the audience as if in a vapor and pouring it back in a flood. Dr. King is that kind of supreme orator, a type so rare as almost to be forgotten in our age. But he is the master of words precisely because he is the servant of his cause.

If the South wants to stop Dr. King's eloquence, let it grant justice to the Negro. Until then his voice will fill the land and Americans of all races and creeds will respond.